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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

14 April 1949

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM #161

SUBJECT: Reactions in Tripolitania to an Italian Trusteeship.

ASSUMPTION: That Italy will become the administering power, under a UN trusteeship, over Tripolitania.

SUMMARY: Installation of Italy as trustee would inevitably be accompanied by some disorders because the Tripolitani are largely antagonistic to Italian rule. The intensity of Tripolitanian opposition to the Italians would depend primarily on the extent of British cooperation in transferring authority, the sufficiency of the UN guarantees to the natives, and the Italian approach to the problem.

1. Present Arab Sentiment.

The sentiment of the Arabs in Tripolitania is generally hostile to Italian rule, this hostility being a legacy of prewar Italian colonial administration. This attitude is most pronounced among the native Arab leaders. Some local sheikhs, however, seem resigned to cooperation, under certain conditions, should Italian trusteeship become a fact.

Italians, on the other hand, point to the electoral victory of moderates (neutral or non-anti-Italian) in recent municipal elections in Tripoli as confirming the likelihood of Arab cooperation.

Note: This paper was prepared by CIA subsequent to consultation with specialists of the Office of Intelligence Research, Department of State, but has not been formally coordinated.

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Apart from the leaders, the mass of Tripolitarians is rather inert politically and less warlike than the neighboring Cyrenaicans. The return of the Italians to Tripolitania would be certain to precipitate some disorders, but opposition would be relatively disorganized and largely concentrated in urban centers. The intensity of hostile reaction would depend on several factors:

a. British cooperation in transferring authority to Italy.

The degree of British cooperation would be a primary factor in the orderliness of the transfer. Officials of the UK Foreign Office have announced that if Italy becomes trustee, the UK will immediately pull out of Tripolitania instead of cooperating in a progressive and orderly transference to the Italians. Generally sensitive to the opinion of Islam, the British are particularly apprehensive of the Senussi reaction in Cyrenaica and seek to avoid any armed clash with the Tripolitarians, however insignificant. Britain's 'one stage' withdrawal from Palestine might serve as a pattern for Tripolitania. Without British cooperation in Italian assumption of authority the Tripolitarians might declare immediate independence, thus rendering the task of re-establishing Italian authority substantially more burdensome both politically and militarily. The British decision not to permit the use of UK troops in the turnover might possibly be modified, however, if such cooperation were made part of a larger bargain assigning a Cyrenaican trusteeship to the UK.

b. UN guarantees to the Tripolitarians.

The Tripolitarians fear that Italy may use a trusteeship to perpetuate itself in Tripolitania. They also fear that extensive Italian colonization might expropriate the native population from their lands. To counteract such misgivings, any UN trusteeship would have to incorporate guarantees (1) of native participation in the government; (2) of ultimate independence after a definite time limit; (3) against land expropriation. Besides being subjected to specific guarantees, Italian stewardship would necessarily be under close scrutiny of the UN Trusteeship Council. If they were brought home to the Tripolitarians, these safeguards might quiet their apprehensions. The propagation of these concepts, however, among an illiterate people largely deprived of press and radio, presents a difficult problem which could be solved only through the aid of cooperative local leaders and sheikhs.

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Without effective diffusion of knowledge concerning these guarantees, there is great danger that the Tripolitani-ans would fail to differentiate between Italian trusteeship and simple colonial rule. Even should these guarantees become understood, the Tripolitani-ans, with the vivid example of Palestine before them, might be skeptical as to their value.

c. Italian attitude toward the Tripolitani-ans.

The extent of native hostility will depend in large measure on the attitude with which the Italians return. Italian manifestation of friendliness and restraint toward the natives, together with willingness to make compromises, might in time allay hostility. Meanwhile, an impressive show of force would tend to curb violence. Italy, however, is in no financial position to win native good will through economic development of the region.

2. Forces Required.

Estimates of the force required to re-establish Italian authority range from a minimum of 13,100 to a maximum of 20-30,000 with appropriate air cover. The higher figure is British and is ten times the approximate 3,000-man force with which the UK presently maintains order in Tripolitania. The lower figure is Italian and presupposes British cooperation in the transfer. At British insistence, Italy has agreed to commit the following forces to setting up its trusteeship: two infantry divisions, each composed of two infantry regiments, each in turn made up of three battalions plus one artillery regiment (two battalions). The two divisions would comprise twelve infantry and four artillery battalions. The Italians would supplement this force by one cavalry (armored car) regiment, one carabinieri group, and one mobile battalion of carabinieri. The British may have exaggerated the scope of the military problem while the Italians may be overly optimistic. It is certain that Italy will need a substantially larger occupation force than the UK. The force which Italy proposes to employ should prove adequate if such favorable circumstances can be combined as British cooperation in the transfer, effective UN guarantees, and a restrained and conciliatory Italian approach to the Tripolitani-ans. The absence of any one of these conditions would call for a progressively larger force.

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3. Tripolitanian Reaction With Respect to the US Role.

The Tripolitanian leaders are well aware that any Italian force enjoys indirect support through US economic aid to Italy. This might antagonize them against the US, particularly as they might reproach its Government for extending financial assistance, thus enabling Italy to raise occupational forces rather than using such funds directly for the economic development of North Africa.

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